

encounters with the teenagers during my trip to Korea made me reflect on my responsibilities as an international faculty member who specializes in second language literacy. Working at an American university where more than 80% of our international student population is of Asian descent, they made me think more seriously about how I can foster intercultural literacy environments that embrace both American students and multilingual students in our classrooms and in campus activities. During my return flight to Seattle, my hand was busy writing down all the thoughts percolating through my mind in the pedagogy book that I always carry when I travel. When the plane landed at the Seattle-Tacoma Airport, it not only brought me home, but also brought with me a sense of deeper awareness of global curriculum that better fits the needs of the new generation of global students. It was an awfully special summer.

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Multi-Cultural Expedition into Mindfulness among High School Students

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Many international college students know first-hand that striving for academic success can be stressful, especially far apart from the support and comfort of home. In today's fast paced world, hardly anyone is exempt from stress, and American high school students are no exception. A recent University of California at Los Angeles study discovered that, among 106 secondary school students, the percentage reporting good or above-average high school emotional well-being declined from 55.3 percent in 2009 to 51.9 percent in 2010 (Nauert, 2011). In an attempt to curb this trend, during the fall semester of 2011, a local high school psychology teacher invited the authors of this article to speak with her 4 psychology classes about stress and relaxation as part of a continuing collaboration with Arkansas State University professors of psychology.

The first author, an undergraduate psychology student involved with research on mindfulness and biofeedback, explained mindfulness to each class as simply being attentive to one's thoughts and feelings, whereas biofeedback is the real-time measurement of physiological functions increasing individual awareness of internal processes through the use of EmWave technology. The emWave uses heart rhythm information to calculate coherence, or balance, between the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems. Studies reveal that a likely connection between the heart and mind is instrumental for facilitating positive emotions (McCraty & Rees, 2009). To illustrate biofeedback in action, we demonstrated how emWave technology coaches participants into a mindful state, through self-observation of one's breathing and heart rhythms. Through bringing the awareness onto these processes, mindfulness limits the stress related impact of negative rumination on the body, diverting the attention away from distressing thoughts. Students expressed their interest and excitement by frequently asking questions. Nearly everyone eagerly rushed to the front of the class to try out the emWave. The teacher was likewise happy to view the emWave firsthand.



The second author, a graduate student hailing from India, the homeland of yoga and mindfulness, followed the former presentation with a brief explanation of yoga's origination and development within a spiritual and cultural Indian context. Prathyusha commented, "The students asked many questions about cultural and religious diversity in India, as well as our educational system." It was a cultural experience for the children at Paragould High School, in Northern Arkansas, to interact with someone from India, which many confessed they had never done." She continued, "It was conversely a multi-cultural experience for me to visit an American public school. The classroom was arranged much differently from back home. In my part of India, every grade is together, but at Paragould High School, everything is very structured and organized, making yoga demonstration possible."

As Prathyusha demonstrated the basic postures comprising *Surya Namaskara*, translated Sun Salutation in English, nearly everyone was eagerly engaged. Some students stood in attempt to follow along with each movement. Others sat watching attentively. *Surya Namaskara* is performed facing the direction of the rising sun. Each *asana*, or body position, is synchronized with the breath, while movements are sequenced to alternately stretch the spine forward and backward. "I thereafter demonstrated some basic breathing exercises, *Pranayama*, which the students emulated from their desks."

Prathyusha continued, "Yoga is like second-nature to me. In contrast to ancient Indian societal values, American culture has until recently offered very few constructive outlets for dealing with the stresses and anxieties of day to day life. I began to study yoga as a child," she related. "My mother teaches yoga in India, and it is also widely practiced in our schools." Studies introducing yogic practices into various American schools have shown promising results. One school in San Lorenzo California reports that the introduction of yoga into its curriculum has resulted in higher test scores and 60 percent less suspensions (CBS News, 2011). "Practicing yoga," Prathyusha reported, "has helped me to overcome academic stresses in my own life. My own yoga practice, and the emotional balance it has provided me, encourages me to share these techniques with young people who likely experience similar challenges in American High School."

After performing yoga exercises for about 15 minutes, we engaged each class in a brief drumming circle based on the "Mindfulness: HealthRHYTHMS® Drumming to Relax" protocol, which is part of the relaxation and biofeedback research we presented.

Drumming has been shown to reduce stress and increase feelings of connectedness among participants and has been used effectively in therapeutic settings (Bensimon, Amir, & Wolf, 2008). The vast majority of students showed interest, smiling as they drummed away their stress. Several confessed they enjoyed the drumming most of all. Jonathan related, "Drumming is a good way for students to connect with each other. As each person drums their individual rhythm, a cohesive tune seems to converge and whatever drama the students may have with each other falls away, at least for that moment." At the end of the day, everyone was happy and smiling, including the two of us.

We were thrilled to receive dozens of thank-you letters from the students to whom we presented. Each letter was filled with references to how the mindfulness and yoga techniques we presented have begun to help them relieve stress. One student wrote, "I've been trying the yoga techniques you showed us and they have been helping a lot for lowering my stress." Another wrote, "I plan to attend Arkansas State University next fall, and I hope to get involved in your research on mindfulness and biofeedback." It is inspiring to read that our presentations are making a difference. It encourages us both to continue sharing these jewels, which originated from Indian culture. We are happy to share the immeasurable gifts of yoga and mindfulness.

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